



## Controlling Arthritis in a Rural Community Through the Arthritis Self-Help Course

### Public Health Problem

Arthritis or chronic joint symptoms affect almost 70 million Americans—nearly one of every three adults, making it among the most common health problems in the United States. Arthritis is the most frequent cause of disability in America; more than 7 million citizens are limited in some way because of arthritis. In Alabama 36%, or 1.1 million people, have arthritis. Of this number, approximately 46% have household incomes of less than \$20,000, and 50% have less than a high school education. In addition, access to health care continues to be a problem outside of the major metropolitan area of Birmingham.

### Evidence That Prevention Works

Research has shown that the pain and disability associated with arthritis can be minimized through the use of appropriate self-management behaviors and early diagnosis and treatment. The Arthritis Self-Help Course, developed at Stanford University, teaches people how to manage their arthritis and minimize its effects. This course, taught in a group setting, has been shown to reduce arthritis pain by 20% and physician visits by 40%.

### Program Example

With CDC support, Alabama is developing and evaluating a community project in Pineapple, an underserved, rural, African American community in Wilcox County, which has some of the state's poorest health indicators. This project, building on an existing community health advisory model, delivers the Arthritis Self-Help Course. By encouraging people to participate in this course, public health advisors are improving the quality of life for people with arthritis in this rural setting. As a result of partnerships developed in conjunction with the Alabama Arthritis Coalition, this project has encouraged a rheumatologist to travel 2 hours from Tuscaloosa to the community of Pineapple to hold a clinic one day each month to give this underserved group access to specialized care and treatment.

### Implications

The Arthritis Self-Help Course has reached less than 1% of the population nationwide; more widespread use of this course would save money and reduce the burden of arthritis. This project demonstrates the importance of identifying and implementing strategies to increase the use of this course in rural, underserved communities. Community-based projects like the one in Alabama are more likely than traditional ones to be responsive to the needs and culture of the community and can serve as a model for reaching underserved populations in other states as well.

### Contact Information